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SUBJECT: ANKARA FORUM PROMOTES BUSINESS COOPERATION AMONG
TURKEY, ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

1. (SBU) Summary: Turkey's Chamber of Commerce organized the first meeting of Israeli, Palestinian and Turkish business associations April 27 in Ankara, Turkey. In a joint statement after the meeting, the three parties named the initiative "the Ankara Forum for Palestine-Israel-Turkey Economic Cooperation." Although the organizers purposely excluded political issues from their discussions, they announced their hope that the forum would contribute to the peace process. They will meet again June 8 in Jerusalem. End Summary.

2. (SBU) On April 27, Rifat Hisarciklioglu, president of the Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB), Shraga Brosh, president of the Manufacturers Association of Israel, and Ahmad Al-Zogheir, chairman of the Palestinian Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture headed their respective business delegations to discuss ways the three parties could promote economic cooperation through business-to-business cooperation and reduce the obstacles to economic development in Palestine. The forum was the brainchild of Hisarciklioglu, who received support from Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan and Foreign Minister Gul. (Comment: The forum and other Middle East-related initiatives by the Turkish Chamber suggest it is one of the few non-governmental organizations in Turkey showing an interest in Middle East issues. End Comment.) According to TOBB International Affairs Advisor Mustafa Bayburtlu, the idea remain stalled as long as Arafat remained in charge of the Palestinian Authority.

3. (U) During the meeting, the three sides referred to a November 2004 World Bank report, "Intifada: Closures and Palestinian Economic Crisis: An Assessment," to identify obstacles to economic development in Palestine and discuss possible remedies. According to Bayburtlu, one idea discussed at the forum was to jointly revitalize former Israeli industrial parks in Gaza. After the meeting, Hisarciklioglu announced that future meetings would focus on cooperation in tourism, industry, infrastructure and agriculture. Tourism seems to be one of the easier sectors in which to develop tri-partite cooperation: the Israelis and Palestinians were interested in Turkish tours coming to both Israel and the Palestinian territories. Bayburtlu said the forum would meet again June 8 in Jerusalem. EDELMAN